

Historical Significance of the Line

'Development railways' were built to open up new country for economic development and provide transport to remote communities. The Bairnsdale to Orbost Railway was one such line in Victoria.

The line traversed difficult railway-building country with many rivers and creeks and some sections of rugged terrain. It was known from the beginning that the railway would be relatively expensive and construction would be complicated. These difficulties were exacerbated by the outbreak of WWI, with materials and manpower now in short supply.

The engineering heritage legacy of the railway is significant with fine extant examples of timber trestle bridges, metal bridges, and composite timber and metal bridges. The remaining structures of the railway will be protected and preserved as they now form part of the East Gippsland Rail Trail.



Damaged milestone recently unearthed near Stony Creek bridge

Recently, staff from the Department of Environment, Lands, Water and Planning unearthed a damaged milestone which marked 205 miles (330 km) from Melbourne buried near the line. Originally located closer to the railway near the eastern end of the Stony Creek Bridge, its exact location is not known. The milestone has been re-erected below the Engineering Heritage Marker.



The ceremony on 21 August 2016 will celebrate the award of an Engineering Heritage Marker to the Bairnsdale to Orbost Railway.

Images: Owen Peake

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ENGINEERS
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Engineering Heritage Recognition Ceremony: Bairnsdale to Orbost Railway

Sunday 21 August 2016



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning



Wairewa Road Bridge

A railway that linked and served isolated communities.

History of the Line

Victoria Railways was established in 1856 and built a significant network of railways, the first being the Goldfield Railways. In 1858, the construction of railway lines from Melbourne to Bendigo and from Geelong to Ballarat started to serve the flourishing population in the goldfields regions. This included the farmers, major businesses and residents along the line.

From the 1850s, settlers in East Gippsland depended on coastal ports for access and transport of goods. The entrances to these ports were unreliable and often dangerous. Meanwhile, settlers started to move inland, away from the ports, so more direct transport routes were required.

The rapid growth of population in the new settlement areas and the requirement to transport their goods (timber, maize, livestock and dairy produce) to the Melbourne markets resulted in demands for the construction of a railway line.

Construction of the railway to Gippsland began from Oakleigh in 1871. Later, it was extended to Morwell in 1877 and in 1888 to Bairnsdale, which became one of the busiest stations beyond Dandenong.

Due to the projected high cost, there were delays approving the railway line between Bairnsdale and Orbost. The Railways Standing Committee recommended the construction of the railway line from Bairnsdale to Bruthen then on to Orbost, a total length of 60 miles (97 km), at an estimated cost of £391,360. Construction of this section of the line started in 1912 and it was opened to the public on 10 April 1916.

This project was one of the most expensive undertaken by Victoria Railways at the time and was managed by respected engineer, Maurice E Kernot.

The railway closed in 1987 with the last train leaving Orbost on 21 August.

Construction of the Line

One major obstacle in building the railway line was the nature of the land. It is hilly and crosses many rivers and creeks. Plans were amended to minimise the cost of the project, but even so, many of the initial designs for the bridges had to be modified as a result of the actual conditions encountered.

The amount of earthwork involved was estimated to be 2,000,000 cubic yards (1,529,110 cubic metres). In those days this work was carried out largely by hand with transport of materials around sites primarily by horse drawn vehicles.



Boggy Creek Bridge

The Mitchell, Nicholson, and Tambo Rivers and Boggy Creek were crossed by permanent metal bridges incorporating timber trestles for approach spans. Large

timber trestle bridges were built at Stony Creek, Wairewa Road, Hospital Creek and across the Snowy River Floodplain.

The line was constructed with 60lb (pounds/yards) steel rails (30 kg/metre) with a ruling grade of 1:50 being used throughout. Sleepers were cut from Ironbark, Yellow Stringy Bark and Mahogany hardwoods. These same timbers were also used for the trestle bridges.

What Remains Today?

Bairnsdale is the only station that exists today. It is still operating and now the end of the line. Very little remains of the stations between Bairnsdale and Orbost.

Most of the magnificent bridges constructed as part of the railway line remain. For example, the Nicholson Bridge was renovated and adapted as part of the East Gippsland Rail Trail.